

## **The Magic of Politics and the Politics of Magic: oral narratives concerning the *inyanga* Khotso Sethuntsa that interweave the supernatural with the discourse of political power in apartheid South Africa**

This study explores the way in which oral and written narratives drawing on forms of supernatural potency became interwoven with the discourse of political power in South Africa during Afrikaner Nationalist rule, with specific reference to the career of the near-legendary millionaire *inyanga*, or medicine man, Khotso Sethuntsa. Khotso, as he is commonly known, was born in 1898 and lived and worked in Kokstad and the Transkei until his death in 1972. Both magic and politics featured prominently in Khotso's career: two forms of power, interacting with and exerting influences upon each other.

Khotso put both oral and written accounts of magical, mystical forces and presences to work, in order to win authority and influence for himself during a period when wealth and political power were in the hands of the white minority. Khotso, one of the richest and most famous herbalists in South Africa, was widely perceived as practitioner of powerful supernatural arts such as *ukuthwala*, a highly dangerous wealth-giving magic. He rose to the height of his wealth and renown during the period when the Nationalist Party took political control and implemented apartheid. From 1948 onwards, the Nationalist government's political ideology was at work, shaping the nature of Khotso's narratives and his career itself.

Referring to what he terms the "modernity of witchcraft", Peter Geschiere draws comparisons between politics and the occult, both of which constitute areas of power in Africa. In general, both politics and magic possess occult - mysterious, seemingly hidden and secret - qualities. As Geschiere observes, political decisions can seem "abrupt and unpredictable", like the workings of magic. Moreover, he compares the magic wrought by skilful political spin doctors to the widespread belief that practitioners of the occult have the capacity to shape the perceptions of those around them, as a result of their esoteric expertise (1997: 3 - 5, 9). Indeed, both politics and magic contain an element of trickery, which can take the form of sleight of hand, deception and psychological manipulation.

Politics and the supernatural are linked in other respects. For instance, some South African politicians have consulted traditional herbalists and diviners,<sup>1</sup> while in parts of the Cameroon where Geshiere carried out his research, some politicians were rumoured to owe their ascendancy to their association with powerful, even perilous supernatural beings and forces (4). This study examines the way in which aspects of Nationalist politics became connected to magic during the apartheid era, as a result of leading Broederbonders' association with Khotso.

In this study, at the centre of these two forms of potency, politics and magic, are the narratives that Khotso related, both oral and written. In this, Khotso was harnessing the power of story, since it served to channel these sources of power. Ken Plummer's description of the relationship between narratives and political processes indicates the way in which stories can become a site of potency.

Stories are not just practical or symbolic actions: they are also part of the political process. ... [Power is] a flow, a process, a pulsate - oscillating and undulating through the social world and working to pattern the degree of control people have or experience over their lives. ... Power is not a simple attribute or a capacity, but a flow of negotiations and shifting outcomes. ... It flows through all interaction, though in starkly different ways (339 - 340).

This calls to mind Michel Foucault's definition of the nature of power as fluid and decentralised. It is not vested in specific bodies, but is instead "everywhere" and thus potentially accessible to everyone (1978: 93). This is borne out in Khotso's case, for although he was a disempowered, marginalised individual, from poverty-stricken, remote rural origins and a black inhabitant of a country under white minority rule, he was nonetheless able to exercise a certain sway, even over those in positions of political dominion.

Narratives provide one means for those furthest removed from centres of power to present themselves as powerful.<sup>2</sup> Khotso harnessed the magic of words to further his career, relating tales describing the wonders of his medicines, especially his potions and concoctions for good fortune and prosperity, for which he was renowned, and the extraordinary extent of his powers. Thereafter, he did his utmost to ensure that such

---

<sup>1</sup> For instance, MaNgconde, a prominent Eastern Cape healer and prophetess, who lives near King William's Town, has adorned one of her reception rooms with photographs of prominent South African politicians who sought her assistance.

<sup>2</sup> We encounter one instance of this in Harold Scheub's *The Tongue is Fire* (1996). Its title suggestive of the potency of storytelling, it highlights the liberatory potential of various folktales related during the apartheid era (Scheub, 1996: xv - xvi).

stories were circulated widely. Russell H. Kaschula comments on "the commercial value of the oral tradition" in contemporary South African society.<sup>3</sup> Khotso provides one early example of this phenomenon, as the creation and dissemination of stories drawing attention to his skill, wealth and renown became a cornerstone of his entrepreneurial activities.

Khotso was aware of the influence oral narratives can exercise over human perceptions and beliefs. One instance of this occurs in politics, in which political speechwriters play an important role in shaping politicians' public profiles and furthering their careers. Further to this, oral historian Isabel Hofmeyr notes of the rural South African context that "even a slight acquaintance with oral literature in a field work situation reminds one of the respect with which many rural communities view stories as a form of eloquence and power" (1993: 181).<sup>4</sup> If stories possess an inherent potency, it follows that some of this power will become vested in their narrators. This may well have been one of the reasons why story-telling appealed to Khotso.

One journalist, Jack Blades, described the effect that Khotso's narratives had on him: "Whenever I drove out through the tall gates of Mount Nelson [Khotso's Lusikisiki headquarters] after talking to Khotso, I knew that he had once again put a spell on me. ... [He] had the secret of making people believe exactly what he wished, at least for a little while." This calls to mind the way in which a skilled politician can exercise the art of making his or her supporters or constituency believe what he or she deems will advance his or her interests.

One of the principal ways in which Khotso used his narratives to capture widespread attention was through interviews he conducted with the press. One of the best-known of these took place in 1954, when Khotso became the subject of a substantial feature in the *Daily Dispatch*, an Eastern Cape newspaper. In his interview with the journalist, Khotso claimed to have a spiritual bond with Paul Kruger, who regularly visited him in visions. In one room, a Voortrekker Monument scarf served as a type of altarcloth, upon which a concrete bust of Kruger rested. Here Khotso would visit Oom

---

<sup>3</sup> For instance, Kaschula observes that, in 1997, the Democratic Party leader in the Eastern Cape legislature was of the opinion that local legends concerning the Mount Ayliff river monster might lure tourists to that area (2002: 7 - 8).

<sup>4</sup> Monica Wilson describes how certain Pondo folktales remind us of this, with their references to things being controlled by the right word or phrase (1936: 306). The ritualistic actions or precautions that traditionally accompanied the telling of tales - however jestingly they may have been carried out - suggests a deep-seated awareness of this too. Tsonga storytellers, for instance, would "spit" a tale in the fire when it reached its conclusion, so that it would be "burned" or "killed" (Hofmeyr: 36).

Paul and pray to him. He also said that Kruger offered him guidance in both financial matters and horse-racing.<sup>5</sup>

In order to display the importance he attached to this renowned Afrikaner leader, Khotso adorned his homes with concrete busts of Kruger and bedecked Mount Nelson, his headquarters in Lusikisiki, the Transkei, with Kruger memorabilia. The coat of arms of the old South African Republic containing the motto "Eendragt Maakt Magt" was painted on the walls of special rooms. On ceremonial occasions, Khotso would don an embroidered, beaded robe in the colours of the vierkleur of Kruger's republic: red, white, blue and green. At the back, coloured buttons spelled out the message: 'God bless President Kruger.'

Later on, Khotso would hold annual Kruger Day celebrations and an outbuilding called Kruger House formed the spiritual heart of his home. It was filled with portraits of Kruger and its walls bore the coat of arms of the old South African Republic. Khotso's clients seeking his powerful medicine for long-term wealth, ukuthwala, were often required to spend a night in Kruger House. Khotso would retreat to this building to meditate on Kruger and today his grave, and the graves of his principal family members rest here.

In 1956, Khotso produced the Kruger House Deposition, a document describing the way in which his family history was interwoven with that of the Kruger household.<sup>6</sup> Khotso bore this document to Kruger House in Pretoria, where the President had once resided, and deposited it there.

The performative aspect is an integral part of oral tradition, and consequently of folklore. Alan Dundes goes further, identifying three elements of folklore: the textural, the contextual and the contextual, all of which are inter-related (cited in Ntshinga, 1994: 123). Khotso's treatment of the figure of Kruger provides an illustration of the nature and functions of these three aspects. Firstly, the textural elements of folklore are the non-verbal performative features, including attire. In Khotso's case, this textural aspect comes to the fore in his veneration of Kruger, the ceremonial activities that arose from this and the iconic significance he attached to his Kruger memorabilia. Next, Dundes identifies the contextual element. As we will see, the specific context in which Khotso operated had direct bearing on the position he

---

<sup>5</sup> Khotso told the journalist that once, after praying to Paul Kruger, he was shown a vision in which he was given the name of the horse that was to win that year's Durban July.

<sup>6</sup> Sethuntsa, Khotso and Fortein, C.J.R. 1956. "Deposition to Kruger House." (Khotso was illiterate, so he dictated the Kruger House Deposition to Fortein, a Kokstad schoolmaster.)

ascribed to Paul Kruger in his life. Dundes also identifies the textual, or verbal, element of folklore, evident in the many stories Khotso related concerning Kruger, the *Daily Dispatch* article and the Kruger House Deposition, which will be examined at this point.

In the Deposition, the story unfolds as follows. Khotso's father, known as Speelman, was Kruger's coachman and trusted servant, eventually becoming his confidant. Khotso's mother, who was called Khaki, worked for Kruger's wife. These two loyal retainers established a special connection with Kruger that took on the quality of a spiritual bond. For instance, it is related that Khaki played a critical role in the history of the old Transvaal by predicting and thereby thwarting the Jameson Raid. Khotso liked to tell people that his own supernatural powers could affect political developments, and here he drew attention to his mother's capacity to influence the path of history. Khotso's own name, meaning peace in Sesotho, was bestowed upon him by Kruger himself, after Speelman successfully carried out a peace-making mission in what was then Basutoland on Kruger's behalf. He described his parents' loyalty to Kruger as "a reminder to posterity of the singular nature and loyalty of the native inhabitants" to the Boers' cause.

Khotso sought to expand upon this claimed family tradition himself. In the latter part of his Deposition, Kruger becomes a subject of spiritual devotion:

Portraits of the President adorn the walls of [Khotso's] house. He explains this as follows: as the Roman Catholic Church worships the Mother Mary, so we worship President Paul Kruger, whose living spirit is always with us to bring us happiness and assure our prosperity. ... So he maintains that his wealth and affluence can be attributed to the late President Paul Kruger, who is worshipped in a special room and signifies to him all that is worth while in life.

Thus, the personal closeness between Kruger and Khotso's parents incorporates their son, translating into a spiritual bond.

David Carr has said that "we are constantly striving, with more or less success, to occupy the story-teller's position with relation to our own lives" (cited in Scheub: xix). We formulate and reformulate the stories of our lives, in order to comprehend or convey them. At times, we offer others glimpses of our own needs and desires, by devising narratives that are suggestive of the kind of lives we would like to lead. In the process, we create our own specific versions of reality, while constructing

identities for ourselves. As M. Somers and G. Gibson remark: "Agents adjust stories to fit their own identities, and, conversely, they will tailor a 'reality' to fit their stories" (1994: 61). For his part, Khotso created his own unique version of reality, which involved a recreation of his identity. His position as a black individual under white minority rule bears out bell hooks's assertion that "[o]ppressed people resist by identifying themselves as subjects, by defining their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history, *telling their story*" (hooks, 1989; cited in Plummer, 1993: 343).

As hooks implies, narratives do not take place in a socio-political void. They involve an audience, with specific expectations and perceptions. Narrators, consequently, may adjust their stories so that they do not run counter to the dominant narratives in the societies in which their tales are related (Berger and Quinney: 2005: 5). Khotso's tales concerning his special bond with Paul Kruger provided him with a certain means of adapting to the socio-political context within which he operated. The particular historical point at which Khotso's Paul Kruger narratives began to appear is of significance here. Ken Plummer, among others, draws attention to one of the key issues to be borne in mind when analysing a narrative: the need to consider why a certain story should arise at a specific point in time (1993: 339). It is worth noting that the *Daily Dispatch* journalist was treated to a description of Khotso's special relationship with Paul Kruger in 1954, six years after the Nationalists had become the ruling party in South Africa. Two years later, Khotso's visit to Kruger House took place, involving a presentation of £100 towards the preservation of this establishment. It was a theatrically staged event, designed in part to attract press interest.

Yet there is another dimension to Khotso's veneration for Paul Kruger. Various informants testify that it did appear sincere. As many narrative theorists (including Ronald J. Berger and Richard Quinney) have observed, by constructing accounts of our lives, we bestow a sense of purpose and direction on them (2005: 5). Khotso's narratives of Kruger's place in his personal history provided a structure around which aspects of his life could be organised, imbuing these features of his career with special significance.

Jean and John Comaroff's description of the innovative, creative aspects of ritual and the new possibilities into which it can lead has a bearing on the way in which the figure of Kruger became the focal point of various important ritualistic activities in Khotso's life:

[R]itual may well be, and frequently is a site and means of experimental practice, of subversive poetics, of creative tension and transformative action; that, under its authorship and its authority, individual and collective aspirations weave a thread of imaginative possibilities from which may emerge, wittingly or not, new signs and meanings, conventions and intentions (1993: xxix).<sup>7</sup>

However, the Comaroffs go on to point out that ritual is unpredictable and ambiguous, sometimes proving liberatory and constructive, while on other occasions taking on reactionary qualities (xxix - xxx). While Khotso's veneration for Paul Kruger provided him with a form of personal freedom and empowerment, it also had a politically conservative dimension. Moreover, on one hand it was charged with mystical significance, while on the other it was self-consciously designed to serve his own interests.

It is possible that Khotso felt a kind of spiritual link with Kruger and accorded the latter a conspicuous place within his personal belief system particularly on account of Kruger's connectedness to money and power. Kruger was not only one of the founding fathers of the nation that had become South Africa's political masters, but he was also associated with wealth: the Kruger millions. Later, Khotso would hint that his fortune was linked to this long-lost treasure trove, and that he had been guided to it as a result of his special connection with Paul Kruger.

Of all the legends surrounding Khotso, it was his narratives concerning his connection with Kruger that appeared to fascinate white South Africans most. Paul Kruger's children, prominent Broederbonders, aware of Khotso's special bond with one of the most renowned leaders of the Afrikaner people, might have been drawn to him partly for that reason. Indeed, one of the most distinctive features of Khotso's career was the way in which he shifted, chameleon-like, into a figure who blended oddly into the political terrain of the ruling Afrikaner establishment.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> For example, the Comaroffs depict ritual as an essential part of the processes by means of which "social facts and collective identities" can be reconstructed (xvi). Clifford Geertz takes this even further, describing the way in which, through ritual, we recreate the world we inhabit or, more precisely, the way in which we perceive it: "In a ritual the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turns out to be the same world, producing thus [an] idiosyncratic transformation in one's sense of reality" (cited in Malan, 1994: 235). The word "idiosyncratic" seems apt in Khotso's case.

<sup>8</sup> "We all know that Khotso of Kokstad had become the greatest friend of Afrikaners and other Europeans," Khotso avowed in the Kruger House Deposition. "He learned to love Oom Paul Kruger's children from his mother Khaki." Khotso told a journalist that his mother had instructed him: "My son, the Afrikaner Government should be your father in the same way that the Oubaas Kruger was father to your own father" (*Natal Mercury*: 11 October 1961).

There are a number of reasons why many people found Khotso's accounts of his family connection with Paul Kruger convincing. Firstly, since Kruger appeared to fulfil a significant spiritual role in Khotso's life, this imparted a sense of authenticity to his stories detailing his link with Kruger. David William Cohen outlines other factors that can make insufficiently unsubstantiated or apparently far-fetched oral narratives appear credible. There is, for one, a potency in "incomplete and unfinished accounts" and "the power not so much of 'a truth' or 'the truth' but of, rather, a *claim* to the truth." These are indeed both features of the Kruger House Deposition. Cohen notes, too, that repetition can make oral accounts appear authentic. Certainly, the stories about the Kruger connection were told and retold time and again, and many who heard these tales seemed inclined to believe them. Finally, Cohen comments that statements can appear more forceful and credible if they are uttered in settings that possess a theatrical quality (2001: 265, 277). In Khotso's case, this was typified by his headquarters, bedecked as it was with striking, highly coloured statues of Kruger and Kruger memorabilia, and his ceremonial robes in the colours of the vierkleur, bearing Kruger's name. These served as the stage, the props and the costume by means of which Khotso's Paul Kruger stories were transformed into striking, memorable performances that may have seemed more believable on account of their dramatic nature.

As a result of these factors, Khotso was able to draw Afrikaner politicians to him. South African prime ministers D.F. Malan, H.F. Verwoerd and J.G. Strijdom, as well as other leading Broederbonders visited Khotso. Government officials, including Hans Abraham, the commissioner general of the Xhosa, also visited Khotso regularly. Concrete busts of Afrikaner premiers, as well as the state president C.R. Swart, adorned his home in Lusikisiki, alongside the busts of Paul Kruger.

In 1948, on the eve of the elections, Verwoerd, then Minister for Bantu Affairs, had a secret late-night meeting with Khotso and was seen leaving his house in Kokstad bearing a bottle of Khotso's special medicine for good luck. In the Transkei and elsewhere in South Africa, the story ran that the NP won the election in 1948 because they had Khotso's muti.

The white minority regime could use Khotso as a showpiece. With his houses, cars and farms, he appeared to provide proof that blacks could prosper under apartheid if they really tried. Moreover, Khotso, with his wealth, influence and capabilities could

help strengthen the positions of the Transkei politicians the Nationalists controlled, such as Botha Sigcau.<sup>9</sup>

But people who knew Khotso well maintain there are other reasons why leading Nationalist politicians sought him out. The man Khotso called his prime minister, James Lunika, suggested that Khotso might have succeeded in convincing his Afrikaner Nationalist guests that a degree of faith in his supernatural abilities was of practical use to them. "The Nationalists believed that Khotso had supernatural powers, but they did not want to be open about it," Lunika maintained. Many of Khotso's family members and followers have expressed the same view. One man expressed the following conviction: "They were his clients. I can put it that way. They wanted power to lead."

For his part, Khotso had succeeded in creating a mythology around himself that appeared to be working to his advantage. However, other powerful narratives were exercising their effect: the myth of white supremacy upon which the Nationalist political ideology was based. "The mythology of politics is in some respects its essence," Munro S. Edmonson remarks in a discussion of the way in which the creation of a political ideology can initially entail a process of mythmaking, and hence a construction of a metanarrative, in accordance with which a specific political doctrine is formulated (1971: 232).

We glimpse the narrative of political domination at work in 1957, after Verwoerd visited Kokstad. Khotso sent a letter of appreciation to him, stating: "It is ... a blessing for us to have such a minister who has great plans for our nation."<sup>10</sup> In his enthusiasm, Khotso did not take into consideration the implications of Verwoerd's "great plans", some of which would affect his own way of life. These are hinted at in the letter of response from Verwoerd, in which he thanked Khotso for his appreciation of what he, "in his capacity as the Minister [for Native Affairs], has done in the interests of good relations between white and Bantu, in accordance with the policy of separate development." Verwoerd went on to provide the following assurance:

---

<sup>9</sup> One instance of this took place in 1939, when Botha Sigcau and his brother Nelson both sought the paramount chieftainship of Eastern Pondoland. Nelson was the rightful candidate, according to tradition, but the white authorities favoured Botha, deeming that he could be bent to their will. Indeed, when the Nationalists assumed power, Botha colluded with them. Various informants claim that Khotso used his medicines and the influence that he wielded to help Botha win the paramouncy.

<sup>10</sup> The correspondence between Khotso Sethuntsa and Verwoerd, entitled "Mr Khotso Sethuntsa Writes to the Minister for Native Affairs", was published in *Umthunywa*, 1 March 1958: 3.

More and more Bantu out of experience will see that quite a lot of avenues have already and are being opened for their own people and more especially in Bantu areas. They will see and love these Bantu Areas as their homeland in which great developments will take place.

In his letter, Verwoerd alludes to his programme of separate development, which would be implemented several months later. Under Verwoerd's premiership, which commenced in the same year that he wrote to Khotso, separate development would give birth to the so-called "independent" homelands. In 1961, Verwoerd would outline the way whites stood to benefit from the homeland system in a speech to parliament: "Separate Bantu states ... [buy] for the white man his freedom and right to retain domination in what is his country, settled for him by his forefathers" (cited in Baldwin, 1975: 221).

This version of reality marks a new stage in Nationalist ideology. Verwoerd believed that with the aid of state intervention, the homeland system could be made viable. Self-sufficient, racially segregated homelands could be used to build support for his party, by means of the political narratives (alluded to in the above extract from Verwoerd's speech) that could be constructed around it, extolling the concept of separate development. Prior to this, D.F. Malan had written a comparable letter to Khotso, greeting him in a friendly manner, all the while assuring him of the benefits of separate development.

Khotso's friendship with the Nationalists did not guarantee him the preferential treatment that he imagined it would. By the latter part of the 1950s, in terms of the Group Areas Act, Khotso was no longer permitted to live and work in the palatial house that he had built for himself in a white urban area in Kokstad. He did not want to leave his home, which was situated beside the Mzintlava river, near deep pools where he carried out some of his work, such as parts of the ukuthwala procedure, his wealth-giving magic, and where he conducted special rituals, by means of which he sought to draw attention to his supernatural powers. He had to relocate to an area set aside for black habitation, so he moved to the Transkei. He was a proud man, and this must have been humiliating for him. It was as if Khotso's stories had been overtaken by the narratives of Afrikaner Nationalism, and his magic overwhelmed by "government witchcraft", to borrow historian Sean Redding's phrase (1996: 555 - 579).<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Redding discusses the underground belief, post-1948, in "government witchcraft", in which the malign power of the state became viewed as comparable to that possessed by forces of occult evil, in its scale and malevolence (1996: 555 - 579). For example, anthropologist Adam Ashforth argues that a

Geschiere's description of the paradoxical aspects of the occult in the socio-political African context could be considered here. Geschiere states that on the one hand, some may seek to use the occult as a means to power. To an extent, this is comparable to Isidore Opkewho's view of the role of magic in traditional African societies, in which the supernatural arts are perceived as offering those subject to hardship and deprivation the possibility of exerting a measure of control over their lives, while holding out the promise of personal empowerment and prosperity that might otherwise seem beyond their reach (1983: 179 - 180).<sup>12</sup> Many of Khotso's clients sought him out for these reasons; while Khotso himself turned to the supernatural as a means of manipulating circumstances and advancing his fortunes. However, Geschiere also argues that the marginalised and disempowered may resort to occult practices out of a sense of impotence. Thus the powers at their disposal amount to "a weapon of the weak", and they are not able to challenge or subvert the systems of political dominance in their specific societies (9 - 10). In his case, Khotso ultimately had to submit to the constraints of the society in which he operated.

This discussion of Khotso's life history could end on this note. In which case, some might discern an element of moral fable here. Some might argue that Khotso overreached himself, believing that he could hold his Nationalist visitors spellbound, whether by the power of his magic, or his stories extolling his magic. Eventually, however, he suffered defeat as a result of his hubris. (The moral aspect of various African trickster tales comes to mind here.) Alternatively, Khotso's story could be viewed in Faustian terms, in which he was ultimately compelled to pay the price for an alliance with dubious, seemingly all-controlling political forces, wielding a power that some might regard as comparable to aspects of the occult.

Stories, it has often been said, can be interpreted in many ways, depending on the nature of their audience and the context in which they are told. Ruth Finnegan depicts this as an essential feature of African oral narratives: "[T]his variability of tales is one

---

commonly held perception in Soweto during the apartheid era was that the government, in its oppressive, exploitative actions, represented "an unmitigated source of evil." Ashforth continues: "Beyond the apparent face of political power ... people perceived an originary source of evil power. The hidden, secret, nature of this power fostered fantasies about an enormous capacity for causing misfortune" (1998: 527). This was reinforced by the assumption in various rural and urban African communities that whites had access to particularly strong magic. Monica Wilson mentions this view in her 1936 study of Pondoland. "All *ubuthi* [materials for sorcery] come from Europeans. They are the real *amagqwirha* [witches and sorcerers]," one of her informants said (316 - 317).

<sup>12</sup> Commenting on the fact that, according to traditional African beliefs in the spiritual and supernatural, humankind "lives in a more than human context", Opkewho posits that "[m]agic therefore exists in traditional life and lore as a means of asserting the human will in a world which poses severe dangers to human existence" (1983: 179 - 180).

of their most apparent characteristics. There is no one *correct* version or form. What on one occasion looks like, say, a 'dilemma tale' or a moralizing parable ... may on another, though otherwise similar in subject matter, look like an aetiological explanation or just a humorous joke" (1970: 329).

Accordingly, Khotso's career could be viewed from other perspectives. We could, for instance, return to Foucault's concept of the fluidity of power, and its omnipresence, as it permeates all aspects of life. At this point, we could examine some problematic aspects of this description. Foucault depicts power as essentially the same, wherever it manifests itself, yet in its nature and operation, the forms of power contained in Khotso's stories and in the nature of the magic that many believed he was able to wield differ in certain significant respects from the type of power that is vested in the socio-political.

Bearing in mind the fact that Khotso was believed to be a worker of magic, the limitations of both academic and political discourses become apparent. Many accounts of supernatural potency in the southern African context resist clear-cut explanation and thus neutralisation, existing beyond the reach of both the academic researcher and systems of political control. Comparably, W.E. Abrahams has described culture as "filling with order that portion of life that lies beyond the pale of state intervention" (cited in Okumu, 1994: 330). To a certain extent, the belief system and ritualistic, ceremonial activities Khotso constructed around the figure of Paul Kruger fulfilled a role of this nature in his life.

Next, there are the narratives concerning Khotso. In their vitality and their multifaceted, multifarious qualities and their tendency to proliferate, stories elude containment. Finnegan, for instance, refers to oral narrative as a "multiplex and changing creature" (279). Moreover, the stories Khotso related did provide him with the liberty to shape his own versions of actuality and identity, at the very same time that he was being deprived of many freedoms. Robin A. Mello has remarked that taking on the identity of a storyteller can bestow "a licence to speak" that transcends ethnic identities and barriers (2005: 202).

In conclusion, we return to the key concern of this study, the interrelationship between magic and politics. Whichever way Khotso's life history is interpreted, it does indicate not just the way in which the fantastical and the physical are intertwined in many folktales, but the way in which the mythic and the magical intersect with the political and socio-economic, as a fundamental aspect of the South African experience.

### **Acknowledgements**

I am indebted to Sylvia Tloti, who worked with me for years as my Research Assistant, for her contribution to my research into the life of Khotso Sethuntsa.

*The Extraordinary Khotso: Millionaire Medicine Man of Lusikisiki* (2007) was produced by Felicity Wood, in collaboration with a co-investigator, Michael Lewis. Various research findings in this paper are drawn from this book.

A number of points made in this study originally appeared articles in *Kronos* (2004), *The Fort Hare Papers* (2005), *The Journal of South African Literary Studies* (2005), *The International Journal of the Humanities*. (Full details are provided in the References below.)

The National Research Foundation and the University of Fort Hare provided funding for this research.

### **Interviews**

*Information contained in this paper derives from interviews with the following individuals:*

Lewis, Michael. 1997. Interview with Ellen Jones.

Lewis, Michael. 1997. Interview with MaDlamini Catherine Sethuntsa.

Lewis, Michael. 1997. Interview with Joe Jordan.

Tloti, Sylvia. 2004 and 2005. Interviews with MaMjoli Eunice Nomantombazana Sethuntsa.

Wood, Felicity and Tloti, Sylvia. 2003. Interview with MaNgconde (Joyce Makiwe Mali).

Wood, Felicity and Tloti, Sylvia. 2003 and 2004. Interviews with James Lunika.

Wood, Felicity and Tloti, Sylvia. 2003 and 2004. Interviews with Thabo Sethuntsa.

Wood, Felicity and Lewis, Michael. 2004. Interview with Lefu MaThabo Motumi.

Wood, Felicity. 2002. Interview with Tsolwana Mpayipheli.

Wood, Felicity. 2002. Interview with Vuyo Sijentu.

Wood, Felicity. 2002 and 2003. Interviews with Anele Mabongo.

Wood, Felicity. 2002 and 2003. Interviews with Fanele Sicwetsha.

Wood, Felicity. 2003. Interview with Mametsi Sethuntsa.

*(The above list excludes those informants who do not wish to be mentioned by name.)*

### **References**

- Ashforth, Adam. 1998. "Witchcraft, Violence and Democracy in the New South Africa." *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* 150 - 152 (2- 4): 505 - 532.
- Baldwin, Alec. 1975. "Mass Removals and Separate Development." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 1 (2) April: 221.
- Berger, Ronald J. and Quinney, Richard. 2005. "The Narrative Turn in Social Inquiry" in Berger, R.J. and Quinney, R. (eds). *Storytelling Sociology: Narrative as Social Inquiry*. Boulder and London: Lynne Reinner Publishers. 1 - 11.
- Blades, Jack. 1982. Unpublished writing on Khotso Sethuntsa.
- Cohen, David William. 2001. "In a Nation of Cars ... One White Car, or 'A White Car' Becomes a Truth" in White, Luise and Miescher, Stephan F. and Cohen, David William (eds). *African Words, African Voices*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 264 - 280.
- Comaroff, Jean and Comaroff, John. 1993. *Modernity and Its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Edmonson, Munro S. 1971. *Lore: an Introduction to the Science of Folklore and Literature*. New York. Holt.
- Finnegan, Ruth. 1970. *Oral Literature in Africa*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press.

Foucault, Michel. 1978. *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Geschiere, Peter. 1995. *The Modernity of Witchcraft: Politics and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa*. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia.

Grobler, Japie. "Die 'New Age' Movement." ([http://www.gksa.org.za/kies/Artikels/artikel\\_11.htm](http://www.gksa.org.za/kies/Artikels/artikel_11.htm)) . Accessed 31 August 2006.

Hammond-Tooke, W.D. 1975. "The Symbolic Structure of Cape Nguni Cosmology" in Whisson, Michael G. and West, Martin (eds). *Religion and Social Change in South Africa*. Cape Town: David Philip; London: Collings: 15 - 33.

Hofmeyr, Isabel. 1993. *We Spend Our Years as a Tale That is Told: Oral Narrative in a South African Chiefdom*. Portsmouth: Heinemann; Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.

Kaschula, Russell H. 2002. *The Bones of the Ancestors are Shaking: Xhosa Oral Poetry in Context*. Landsdowne: Juta.

Maines, David. 1993. "Narrative's Moment and Sociology's Phenomena: Towards a Narrative Sociology" in *The Sociological Quarterly* 34 (1): 17 - 38.

Malan, Liezl. 1994. "Translating Worlds: The Religious Discourse of a Married Couple in Cape Town." In Sienaert, Edgard and Cowper-Lewis, Meg and Bell, Nigel (eds). *Oral Tradition and Its Transmission: the Many Forms of Message*. Papers given at the Fourth International Conference on Oral Tradition. Campbell Collections and Centre for Oral Studies: University of KwaZulu-Natal: Durban: 234 - 250.

Mello, Robin A. 2005. "Telling Tales: Journey of an Itinerant Storyteller." In Berger and Quinney: 195 - 206.

"Mr Khotso Sethunsa Writes to the Minister for Native Affairs." *Umthunywa*. 1 March 1958: 3.

Ntshinga, T.N. 1994. "'The Song Beyond the Song': Aesthetics and Social Interaction in Xhosa Songs." In Sienaert, Cowper-Lewis and Bell: 122 - 129.

Okumu, Charles. 1994. "The Place of Oral Poetry in Contemporary Ugandan Society: the Oral Artist as Historian and Commentator." In Sienaert, Cowper-Lewis and Bell: 329 - 345.

Opkewho, Isidore. 1983. *Myth in Africa*. Cambridge University Press.

"Pondo Millionaire Has 2 New Wives." *Natal Mercury*: 11 October 1961.

Plummer, Ken. 1993. "An Invitation to a Sociology of Stories." In Gray, Ann and McGuigan, Jim (eds). *Studying Culture*. London: Arnold: 333 - 345.

Redding, Sean. 1996. "Government Witchcraft: Taxation, the Supernatural and the Mpondo Revolt in the Transkei, South Africa: 1955 - 1963." *African Affairs* 95 (381) October: 555 - 579.

Sethuntsa, Khotso and Fortein, C.J.R. 1956. "Deposition to Kruger House."

Somers, M. and Gibson, G. 1994. "Reclaiming the Epistemological 'Other': Narrative and the Social Construction of Identity." In Calhoun, C. (ed). *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*. Oxford: Blackwell: 37 - 99.

"Transkei's Richest Native: the Incredible Dr Khotso." *Daily Dispatch*. 17 July 1954.

White, Luise and Miescher, Stephan F. and Cohen, David William. 2001. "Introduction: Words, Voices and African History" in White, Miescher and Cohen (eds): 1 - 30.

Wilson, Monica Hunter. 1936. *Reaction to Conquest*. London: Oxford University Press.

Wood, Felicity. 2004. "Snakes, Spells, Cadillacs and Kruger: Oral Accounts of the Extraordinary Career of Khotso Sethuntsa." *Kronos* 30 (November): 167 - 183.

Wood, Felicity. 2005. "Blood Money: an Analysis of the Socio-economic Implications of Oral Narratives Concerning Wealth-giving Snakes in the Career of Khotso Sethuntsa." *Journal of South African Literary Studies* 21 (1 - 2): 68 - 92.

Wood, Felicity. 2005. "Paul Kruger, His Children and the Wife Under the Water: Mythology, Spirituality and Power in the Career of Khotso Sethuntsa." *Fort Hare Papers* (14): 91 - 112.

Wood, Felicity. 2007. "The Shape-shifter on the Borderlands: A Comparative Study of the Trickster Figure in African Orality and in Oral Narratives Concerning One South African Trickster, Khotso Sethuntsa." *International Journal of the Humanities* 4 (7): 19 - 26.

Wood, Felicity in collaboration with Lewis, Michael. 2007. *The Extraordinary Khotso: Millionaire Medicine Man of Lusikisiki*. Johannesburg: Jacana.